

Those Were the Days! A Short History of the East Asian Libraries Cooperative World Wide Web

Maureen Donovan

This presentation is an update of the East Asian Libraries Cooperative World Wide Web (<http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu>). Some in the audience may remember the first presentation that I gave at CEAL about this project, in March 1994 under the title, "Possible Uses of the World Wide Web in East Asian Collections." A lot has happened since then!

The origin of the project can be traced back a bit further, to the Third Regional Conference of Asia Libraries in the Midwest, held in Ann Arbor in June 1989 at which participants identified a need to transmit such information as tables of contents to each other and to researchers. Already fax technology was available and we collectively imagined a kind of fax that could be transmitted simultaneously to several recipients. When the action agenda was drawn up, I was given the task of investigating emerging technologies to determine how to do this.

Upon returning to Ohio State, I began learning everything I could about image processing and transmission technology. Through an email list I met a librarian at Australian National University, Tony Barry, who had similar interests. Based on his advice, I realized the need for a computer with enough memory to store scanned images and function as an ftp server. The OSU Systems Librarian, Anna Wang, and I wrote a grant proposal for an OSU seed grant to acquire such a machine, the Macintosh Quadra 950, and a scanner. The grant was successful and we began experimenting in Fall 1991.

Initially the tools and techniques were quite primitive. In the summer of 1993 Tony Barry forwarded an email from Marc Andreessen announcing the Beta version of Mosaic, the predecessor of Netscape. The minute I tested it, I knew — as everyone else would a few months later -- that this was a solution to the needs identified at the 1989 Ann Arbor meeting that exceeded our wildest hopes. I presented a paper that addressed the changes implicit in the evolving technology for librarians at East Asian collections at the ICANAS in Hong Kong that summer, entitled: "Human Resources for Asian Collections in a Networked World: The Time is Now."

At Ohio State we prepared grant applications to the U.S. Department of Education Title II-A and to the Japan-US Friendship Commission for projects entitled, "Project for East Asian Resource Sharing (PEARS)" and "Project for Japanese Resource Sharing," respectively. Before we knew it we were working with colleagues at nine other institutions to realize the promise of this emerging technology. The institutions that were included in these grants were: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin (PEARS grant) and Berkeley, Columbia, Duke and MIT (PJRS grant).

Once we got these multi-institutional grants, project management immediately became a challenge. The funds we received were allocated for equipment and student hours. There was not enough money to hire a project manager or other dedicated personnel or to hold meetings to

facilitate coordination of effort. I still had my main job, which was expanding in scope, with income from a sizable endowment to spend.

Nonetheless, web sites went up at all of the participating institutions. I reported on these projects in detail at the Beijing IFLA in 1996 in a paper: "East Asian Libraries Cooperative World Wide Web: An experiment in collaboration to build interdependence."¹ The East Asian Libraries Cooperative WWW was ranked one of the most widely linked sites in 1997.² It continues to get a lot of traffic.

Ohio State acquired a very large UNIX computer (Sun SPARCcenter 2000) for a cost of about \$90,000 from the Title II-A funds. After the grant-funded period was over, I felt strongly that the availability of this computer should continue to be exploited for cooperative projects supporting research on East Asia using World Wide Web technology.

Working with engineering graduate students, whom I was able to hire in a graduate research assistant position, I concentrated on database development. The first database was that we put up on the web was the Japanese Company Histories database, with data converted from a Pro-Cite bibliography into a number of flat file lists on the web site (<http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu/dbase/DbaseHP.html>). Later we put the data into an interactive, searchable file (<http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu/ShashiDB/default.html>). This database also includes links to scanned images of tables of contents of a number of these books.

Furthermore, we set up a secure system that would allow contributions from remote project participants. In particular, I began working with scholars. One example is the National Taiwan University Center for Buddhist Studies (<http://pears2.lib.ohio-state.edu>), for whom I provide a mirror site to improve North American access to their extensive databases. Another example is Kinema Club, a project initiated by Japanese cinema scholars to share information about research resources. Their web site (<http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu/Markus/Welcome.html>), including a database of Japanese cinema studies, went up in 1995 and was followed later by the Kineijapan@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu, a scholarly mailing list on Japanese cinema studies with about 400 subscribers worldwide. I serve as the main "owner" of that list at Ohio State, but Aaron Gerow (Yokohama National U) and Markus Nomes (U Michigan) bear most of the responsibility for the list and its operations, both technical and intellectual.

I also explored cooperation with organizations, especially the Association for Asian Studies. During a three-year period (1995-97) I ran a cooperative electronic resources booth in the AAS Exhibits Hall, with a goal of supporting scholars and librarians involved in creating electronic resources. In 1996 I organized a well-attended workshop held in conjunction with the Honolulu AAS meeting. A prototype for a database of annotated entries for web resources in Asian studies was set up after a discussion at AAS -- this was the precursor of the Digital Asia Library project currently underway at U of Wisconsin. I also started the Asiandoc electronic newsletter (<http://asiandoc.lib.ohio-state.edu>) where developers of electronic resources for Asian studies could share information about their projects. While all of these efforts were successful to some extent, gradually efforts like these came to seem less necessary.

I also have worked closely with the North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources. In 1997 I volunteered to look into setting up a union list of Japanese serials to support the ARL Global Resources Program's Japan Project. There was no model to follow for how to do this, so I worked with my graduate research assistant to develop software designed to fulfill the dreams of the 1989 meeting mentioned earlier. By a series of lucky coincidences, I met an executive from the Honda Corporation who took an interest in my research — he refers to my office as a "lab" — and provided a donation from Honda to support programming for the union

list during 1998-99.

The union list software, which consisted of a large number of inter-related cgi scripts proved to be unstable. Ultimately data was corrupted as a result of software problems. When we could not fix it and efforts to find more funding proved futile, my supervisor convinced me to shift my focus away from web projects and toward collection management. By this time the grant-funded computer was aging, so Ohio State purchased a replacement, with the understanding that it might be used in part for other purposes as well (as it now is). My new supervisor continues the same advice, with added pressure to do a more traditional kind of research, leading to publication in peer-reviewed sources.

Following the NCC San Diego meeting, a meeting was held at ARL in July 2000 to discuss the future of the union list. At that meeting Ohio State agreed to stabilize the data (by moving it into XML), finish inputting data we had on hand along with information in the 1992 printed union list, complete this work by October 1, 2000, and maintain the database on our server until a new home could be found. We have followed through on those commitments. A revised and updated edition of the Union List of Japanese Serials and Newspapers was made available on the web in XML format on September 30, 2000: (<http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu/uljsn/default.html>). The database is a stable XML file ready for further development once its new home is determined.

With all that experience running a web site, what am I doing now? Well, I am increasingly focusing on integrating my work into larger library systems. For example, rather than establishing a separate database of Ohio State's manga collection we have added collection information and specific genre terms (shojo manga, yakuza manga, etc) to records so that they can be retrieved directly from the OPAC (<http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu/manga/default.html>). I am thinking of doing the same for the Japanese company histories collection, so that I will not need to continue maintaining the separate database that exists now. As part of U Wisconsin's Digital Asia Library (<http://digitalasia.library.wisc.edu>), I am cataloging Japanese web resources in CORC. These records will be integrated into Ohio State's OPAC as well. At the ARL meeting last July, the clear preference was for incorporating retrospective records and holdings information in the national bibliographic utilities, although everyone appreciated the need for a union list in the short term. Overall, the direction is toward integration of subject collections in mainstream library systems, thereby facilitating access, document delivery, and reference services. The East Asian Libraries WWW is still up and running. I still think of it as the electronic shelf of my collection, but its future direction is uncertain.

Before concluding, I want to mention some books that have influenced me and helped me to understand more about the context in which we work. While some specific information in these works might be out of date, I still find them useful and recommend them highly:

Frederick P. Brooks, Jr. *The Mythical Man-Month: Essays on software engineering* (Addison-Wesley, 1975)

Carl Malamud. *Exploring the Internet: a technical travelogue* (Prentice Hall, 1993)

Nicholas Negroponte. *Being Digital* (Knopf, 1995)

Clayton M. Christensen. *The Innovator's Dilemma* (Harvard Business School Press, 1997)

Larry Downes and Chunka Mui. *Unleashing the Killer App: Digital strategies for market dominance* (Harvard Business School Press, 1998)

John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid. *The Social Life of Information* (Harvard Business School Press, 2000)

Notes:

¹Maureen H. Donovan, "East Asian Libraries Cooperative World Wide Web: An experiment in collaboration to build interdependence," *Proceedings of the Special Conference on the Evolving Research Library and East Asian Studies in Conjunction with the IFLA Conference in Beijing* (Beijing: International Academic Publishers, 1996), 108-119; also published in: *New Review of Information Networking* 2 (1996), 219-228.

² *The Most Popular Web Sites from A to Z*. 2d ed. (Lycos, 1997), 924; 948. Selected as one of the "25 most popular world sites: based on a count of the number of sites linked to the site by web pages in the Lycos database.